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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATE OF HAWAII

General Population Focus Group Findings

SMS

1042 Fort Street Mall
Suite 200
Honolulu, HI 96813
Ph: (808) 537-3356
Toll Free (877) 535-5767
Fax: (808) 537-2686
E-mail: info@smshawaii.com
Website: www.smshawaii.com

SMS Affiliations and Associations:

Alan Barker Associates
Experian
International Survey Research
Latham Synchronized Relationship
Marketing
Mediamark Research Inc.
NCQA Certified
Stephanie Kaneshiro – Big Island Affiliate
Warren Dastrup – Kauai Affiliate
3i Marketing & Communications

Prepared by:

SMS Research & Marketing Services, Inc.
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EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Primary Causes of Fatalities**
 - Most of the participants said that speed and/or alcohol contributed to the fatalities in Hawaii.
 - Reckless driving was also mentioned, which closely related to speeding, inattentiveness, and/or a disregard for traffic laws.
 - During a small group poll, speeding was voted as the primary cause of fatalities.
- **Speeding**
 - The group's consensus was that just about everybody on Oahu's roadways speeds in excess of five to fifteen miles per hour over the posted speed limit.
 - A few of the participants claimed that breaking the speed limit while staying with the flow of traffic was legal because the motorist does not impede other drivers.
 - The extreme speeders were identified as young males with modified cars.
 - The reasons for extreme speeding related to ego.
- **Deterring Speeders**
 - Some of the suggestions provided included an additional racetrack, revoking licenses, and/or confiscating vehicles.
 - It was also suggested that police presence be increased and driver's education be improved.
 - Numerous participants brought up the idea of showing graphic images of car accidents and victims.
- **Pedestrians**
 - Older individuals were identified as frequent victims in pedestrian accidents.
 - Some of the bad pedestrians habits included inattention and jaywalking.
 - The reasons for jaywalking were impatience and lack of enforcement.
 - For the drivers, their inattention and lack of respect contributed to the pedestrian's fears while crossing the street.
- **Preventing Pedestrian Fatalities**
 - Some of the suggestions to improve pedestrian safety included overpasses, new paint color for crosswalks, and education for the driver and pedestrian.
- **Pedestrian Program Names**
 - There was no strong support for any of the program names presented, but "Save Our Seniors" was well received because they thought the saying could be easily recognized.
 - Quite a few participants did not know the translation for Kupuna.

- **Seatbelts**

- The participants gave a number of reasons as to why they started wearing a seatbelt, which included the seatbelt law, other family members, and awareness through media.
- There were focus group members that said they wore a seatbelt in the front seat but rarely while sitting in the back.
- Backseat usage was low because it was not mandatory, but some said they would start wearing one if a law was introduced.

- **Motorcycles**

- There were mixed responses for a motorcycle helmet law.
- Of those that did not favor a helmet law, their rationale was based on personal choice.

- **Motorcycle Safety**

- There was support for education among motorcyclists and drivers.

- **Overall Safety Improvements**

- Most of the suggestions revolved around education and enforcement.
- Participants said people moving to Hawaii may not know all of the laws because regulations were different in other parts of the country.
- Others stated that drivers may forget the laws over time because they no longer review the laws when taking the written test for a license renewal.

OVERVIEW

Study Objectives

SMS was commissioned by the Hawaii Department of Transportation to conduct a series of focus groups to gain a better understanding of traffic safety behaviors in the areas of extreme speeding, elderly pedestrians, motorcycle helmet usage, seatbelt usage as well as general discussions that covered all four topics. The final round of focus groups covered the key issues under all four topics by exploring the perspectives of a mix of males and females of all ages. This phase of the DOT study will be integrated with research findings from earlier stages in order to develop a social marketing campaign that will change the behaviors of extreme speeders in Hawaii. The research objectives for this study were to determine:

- The behavior of the participants as drivers as well as pedestrians
- The primary causes of fatalities for drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and motorcyclists
- Suggested solutions to prevent fatalities among the four target groups

Methodology

The recruitment was completed through random phone calls. An incentive of \$50.00 was offered during the recruiting. In addition, participants that arrived fifteen minutes early were eligible for a drawing to win an extra \$50.00.

The two sessions were conducted during an evening in January at SMS' in-house focus group facility. The focus groups were led by Hersh Singer, an experienced moderator and the owner of SMS. Discussion guides were developed from the research objectives, which served as an outline for the main topics of each session. Additional areas were covered beyond the moderator's guide when undiscovered topics emerged.

KEY FINDINGS

Primary Causes of Fatalities

The focus group initiated with a discussion on the primary causes of traffic fatalities in Hawaii. Most of the respondents attributed accidents to speeding and/or alcohol. The issue of speeding overlapped with reckless driving, which also stemmed into inattentiveness and a disregard for traffic laws. One of the recurring causes of inattentiveness was cell phone usage while driving. The topic concluded with a poll of the leading cause for traffic fatalities, and speeding was voted as the primary reason.

Selected Comments

“Alcohol and drugs. I know a lot of friends and friends of friends. Most of the fatalities came from drinking at parties, graduation parties, and birthday parties. It’s like out of every party, one kid dies. When that kid drives drunk, he’s going to hit another car and cause three other people to die, you know.”

“Speeding...speeding and alcohol, they go together.”

“On Oahu, it’s a mixture of speeding and alcohol.”

“I always see people driving way too fast unnecessarily. They change lanes unnecessarily. They follow too close. I think all of those factors contribute to accidents.”

“I would say reckless driving. Speed alone may not always kill.”

“Reckless driving as opposed to speeding... Changing lanes unsafely, following too close, disregarding the weather conditions, or driving faster or slower than the flow of traffic.”

“It’s the repeat offenders. It’s often the same people.”

“Inattentiveness is a long list, it starts with inexperienced people and distracted people.”

“Distractions like the cell phone or trying to change the radio.”

“Not wearing a seatbelt.”

Moderator: “You voted that the top causes for fatalities on Oahu were first speeding, then alcohol, and then reckless driving.”

Speeding

The group's consensus was that speeding in excess of five to fifteen miles per hour of the speed limit was a normality among most of the motorists on the highway. A few even agreed that breaking the speed limit while going with the flow of traffic was legal because they were not impeding other drivers. On the other hand, some of the drivers admitted to driving faster when there were not that many vehicles on the road.

The topic soon evolved into extreme speeders who were identified as young males with modified cars. The participants pointed out that racing was ego-driven because the drivers competed to see who had the fastest car. One of the focus group members used the analogy of a loaded gun when referring to street racers.

Selected Comments

"I don't think speeding has anything to do with age. There's older women and gentlemen that speed also. They might be late for something."

"When you're late or in a rush, our society is always in a rush. We end up speeding whether we like it or not."

"There's some people that just abuse it... They're late and need to make it there faster. They wake up five minutes late and figure that they can make it up on the road."

"I'm always in a hurry. I'm always late, but it's careful. I'm paranoid always when I do it. I'm always looking for a cop. It's not like I'm oblivious to what I'm doing."

"It's a rush to speed. I think a lot of people that speed think they're in control of the situation."

"On my driver's test, the only question I got wrong said, 'How fast do you drive?', and I put speed limit. The answer is not speed limit. The answer was at a speed that's reasonable and prudent, so if everybody is going 65, you have to go 65. When you're going 55, you're creating a hazard on the road now."

"You're not supposed to drive the speed limit, you're supposed to drive with the flow of traffic."

"If I'm not mistaken, you have to go with the flow of traffic."

"I've been told that you go with the flow of traffic so you don't impede the traffic. Then you have that one person that is impatient and is weaving in and out of traffic. They do the unexpected stuff."

“Everybody goes 65 on H2.”

“Those that drive 10 to 15 over every time, they’re the ones that are used to it, but they’re the ones most likely to get into an accident.”

“It’s always a learned thing, too. If you’re always going the same route, and it’s going 65 miles per hour, the next time you go on it, you’re going to go 65.”

“It’s monkey see monkey do, too. If one guy’s going fast, then the next guy is going faster, and the next guy is going faster.”

“If you’re driving the speed limit, everyone is whipping past you or tailgating you.”

“I speed usually when I’m one of the few people on the road... I don’t notice how fast I’m going when there aren’t that many cars moving around me.”

“I tend to go faster when there’s no one on the road... You’re less likely to cause an accident if it’s only you.”

“Some people are willing to take the risk. When you got a Mustang, and it’s nighttime with nobody on the street, yeah I’ll speed. When I’m in town in the middle of the day, the risk in my head is that it’s not worth it. There’s too much cops and too much cars.”

“I don’t think the speed limit reflects proper driving here. They’re too low in some places. It’s ridiculous. In a few places, they’re too high like on residential streets.”

“It’s hard for a car to go 25 in a 25 mile per hour zone. It’s a ridiculous speed.”

“From Kapolei to Makaha it’s a racetrack... When you see break lights, that’s the only time people stop. It means there’s a cop or an accident.”

“Two kids with nice cars want to go head to head.”

“Ego, the kids want to race each other to see who has the fastest car.”

“It’s the young males with the fixed up cars.”

“I see them as potential killers. It’s like playing with a loaded gun. You could shoot someone accidentally.”

Deterring Speeders

The focus group respondents provided a number of ideas to limit the amount of extreme speeders on the road. The first set of suggestions was to provide an additional racetrack, so that they would not speed on the roadways. Other participants favored law enforcement approaches such as revoking their license and/or confiscating their cars. Some of the participants wanted to increase the police presence on the streets or install speed-monitoring cameras. The participants also suggested better driver's education as well as utilizing graphic images of the after effects of high-speed car accidents.

Selected Comments

"Give them a track, a place to race their cars. That's what it's all about, having the fastest car... You've got to give them a place to do that."

"I think there should be more places to race. We just have Campbell. That's it."

"Enforce more penalties. Severe penalties like losing the car."

"Take their license away, too."

"How about for a repeat offender a mechanical device that goes off when they're speeding."

"We can stop a lot of speeding if we put more policemen on the road instead of parking them... Our biggest problem is that we have a lot of police, but they're not on the road."

"People speed because they can. You have to have a cop go by every five minutes."

"Put a camera every ten miles down the freeway, and no one would speed anymore."

"That huge thing on the Pali that tells you your speed limit helps because it lets you be more aware of what you're doing. When you see that thing flashing, you slow down."

"You know what else helps with speeding, a blue flashing light."

"There's no way you're going to solve the speeding problem."

"You can stop the speeding problem. Just make it not acceptable."

"Educate them. Start them young and early like we do with the drugs. Tell them racing is bad. It's something, but it's not the magic pill."

“Any type of education. To me, knowledge is power. We could have them at the DMV, we could have them at Long’s, we could have them at Holiday Mart, we could have them in the newspaper or at the movies. If one person picks it up and says, ‘Gee, I better take it easy going home today’ it would help.”

“They should show them one of those driver’s ed movies. It worked for me. Show them taking the body out of the car.”

“You always see the pictures of accidents, but you don’t see the after effect. They don’t show the dead bodies on the road.”

“I think the shock value will work, but it has to go deeper than that. It could be your mom, it could be your dad.”

Pedestrians

Some of the participants recognized that the older generations are most often the victims of the pedestrian accidents. Most of the discussions focused on pedestrians in general. The group members pointed out quite a few bad habits exhibited by pedestrians that included inattention and not using crosswalks. The reasons for not using a crosswalk related to impatience or minimal enforcement of jaywalking.

There was also discussion from the driver’s side of the pedestrian safety issue. As with pedestrians, inattentiveness was acknowledged as one of the primary causes of accidents. In addition, some of the participants identified the insecurities of using a crosswalk with the reason that drivers do not always stop when pedestrians are attempting to cross. One participant attributed this to a lack of respect on the part of the drivers toward the pedestrians.

Selected Comments

Pedestrians

“Old are a problem... hearing... Very seldom you’ll hear about a young guy getting hit.”

“It’s always those old people that are getting hit.”

“I seen an accident where this old, oriental lady stepped into the street and a bus hit her.”

“Pedestrians walking in the street. They’re not crossing in the crosswalk, and there’s some places where there’s no sidewalk.”

“People don’t use crosswalks because they’re in a hurry.”

“Here, people just step off the curb and expect cars to stop. Back where I’m from, pedestrians have to wait for all of the cars to pass.”

“Pedestrians in a crosswalk is a false sense of security. When you’re in a crosswalk, you’re still in the middle of the road.”

“There are marked crosswalks where you can’t cross safely. Just because there’s a crosswalk doesn’t mean it’s safe to just go across... At an intersection with lights, that’s a different story.”

“When I’m in a crosswalk, sometimes I run across the street.”

“Even when I’m in a crosswalk, I still don’t feel safe”

“Waikiki, as long as I can remember, has always been old ladies and men that just step off without looking left and right. They take it for granted.”

“Sometimes they just walk out and they don’t even look.”

“How many times do I see people not paying attention? Stop, look, and listen. I’m one of those people that are terrified to cross the street. It’s like this big phobia I have.”

“Pedestrians expect you to see them. The drivers are expecting the pedestrians to see them, but no one is looking.”

“The pedestrians should also have an obligation to obey the signals.”

“Jaywalking is not enforced. I got a ticket for jaywalking. When I went to court, the judge said, ‘This is the first time I seen a jaywalking ticket in a long time. You must of done something real bad.’”

Drivers

“One thing when drivers hit pedestrians is because they didn’t see them. It’s not their intention.”

“You can have someone that’s not an alcoholic that speeds. You can have someone that’s speeding that hits someone on the crosswalks... inattentive driving.”

“Drivers not paying attention. Talking on the telephone and distractions.”

“People that drive tend to get tunnel vision and peripheral vision is less.”

“Young people are more alert. We’re more likely to be the hitter. We’re the ones in the car... They’re less experienced.”

“I seen people stop and wait, and I seen people just go through a crosswalk because they can.”

“It seems like an unnecessary stop when you’re waiting for someone to cross. People coming from behind may not stop in time.”

“Right turn on red still baffles some people around here.”

“The law is that they have to completely cross the street, but town traffic would never move if that was the case.”

“If you’re a driver, you’re protected by the vehicle. If you’re a pedestrian you don’t have anything.”

“I don’t trust any driver. I wave to say, ‘Hi, I’m here’ and start walking.”

“That’s where we lose it as a society because that person could be you crossing the street. We just lost courtesy for each other.”

Preventing Pedestrian Fatalities

The focus group members were able to come up with a few suggestions to increase pedestrian safety. Their ideas included pedestrian overpasses, a different crosswalk paint color, and education for the driver and pedestrian.

Selected Comments

“Crosswalks over the street. Those overpasses.”

“They should paint the crosswalk a different color.”

“I like the signs that give the seconds before the light changes. It gives people a way to know how fast they have to cross the street.”

“If you add three seconds to every crosswalk then you’re going to have all of Nimitz backed up. They have those lights synchronized.”

“Drivers need more education.”

“Both the drivers and pedestrians need to be educated.”

“The police department has a Traffic Safety Bureau and goes to all of the schools to teach traffic safety.”

Pedestrian Program Names

Proposed program names relating to a pedestrian safety program for drivers were presented to the group. These names included “Take Care For Our Kupuna,” “Kupuna Crossing,” “Kupuna Moments,” and “Save Our Seniors.” There was little feedback given about the names, and a couple of participants did not know the translation of the Hawaiian word ‘Kupuna.’ In addition, one participant noticed that the word pedestrian was not included into any of the program names presented.

Selected Comments

“I don’t know what Kupuna means.”

“Kupuna is what?”

“You could live here and not know what Kupuna means.”

“I liked the Kupuna one, but he brought up the point that a lot of people don’t know what Kupuna means.”

“You’re missing the word ‘pedestrian’ in everything you showed us.”

“‘Save Our Senior S.O.S’ everyone knows what that means.”

Seatbelts

A few of the participants were able to recall the first time they started wearing a seatbelt. The participants were influenced by the seatbelt law, other family members, and danger awareness through print and media. Most of the discussions covered backseat seatbelt usage with many of the participants saying they rarely used the constraint in the back because it is not the law. On the other hand, some of the people said they would wear a seatbelt in the backseat if it was the law.

Selected Comments

“I started wearing a seatbelt when they made it a law.”

“Sometimes I forget. I only wear it when my step-daughter tells me to.”

“Where I grew up, they would scare you out of your wits with signs and commercials on TV saying you must wear your seatbelt. I got scared into it.”

“In Washington State, where I’m from, it’s a law for everyone in the car to wear a seatbelt.”

“I don’t wear seatbelts in the backseat... It’s not the law.”

“I would say it’s safer in the backseat.”

“The law is that you don’t have to wear a seatbelt in the backseat. People are going to go by the law in what they think is right or wrong.”

“If you make a law where everybody in a car has to wear a seatbelt, then people will do that.”

“I depends if it’s adults in the backseat. If it’s kids, then I make them buckle up... If they’re adults, then they should know.”

Motorcycles

The moderator was able to briefly touch on motorcycle riders. There were mixed responses for mandatory helmet use with some of the participants favoring a helmet law. Conversely, some of the participants did not agree with a law and said it should be based on a choice to wear a helmet.

Selected Comments

“The nature of the vehicle itself makes you risk your life.”

“A lot of times, I see motorcycle drivers going very recklessly, and they’re weaving in and out of traffic.”

“You don’t ever see anybody come off base without a helmet. On base it’s required.”

“I think they tried to pass the law, but the Legislation got too many complaints.”

“If there isn’t a law, then there should be.”

“If they don’t want a helmet, I don’t think they should have to wear one.”

“If they get into an accident without a helmet and they die, it’s probably better than wearing a helmet and being a vegetable and having to take care of them their whole life.”

Motorcycle Safety

There was not that much discussion on motorcycle safety, but there was support for education as well as a suggestion for motorcycle lanes.

Selected Comments

“Defensive driving school... There’s a lot of non-attentive and non-skilled riders... People do not look out for motorcycle riders. They don’t use their mirrors or don’t use there signals.”

“Education for drivers and motorcyclists.”

“It would never pass, but you could have motorcycle lanes.”

Overall Safety Improvements

There were comments made that related to traffic safety in general. Most of the suggested improvements revolved around laws and education. A couple of participants noted that some people moving to Hawaii do not know various laws because they varied across the country. In addition, some of the drivers may be forgetting the laws because they no longer have to take the written test when their license is renewed. In order to combat this problem, some of the participants suggested an education and enforcement combination in which people are taught or reminded of the laws with police targeting the lawbreakers.

Selected Comments

“I think it’s confusing for people coming to Hawaii. Some other states have different laws.”

“A lot of it is disregard for the law, and a lot of it is because they don’t even know. Before, we had to take the driver’s test and study the book. Now, we don’t. You just go in and renew your license.”

“In the driver’s test, they don’t have situational things, they just have traffic laws.”

“Laws make it more acceptable to society, and it would be more acceptable for your behavior.”

“Laws are made everyday, but they don’t make an impact because they’re not enforced.”

“As a society, we contradict ourselves sometimes. We want safety and laws, but we want freedom.”

“For speeding, I’d put 100% on enforcement. For seatbelts, I’d put it all on education.”

“I would say 60/40 with the focus on enforcement.”